

# Public Involvement Plan for Project #12210C; BF A004 (152) The Construction of a New Bridge Over the Connecticut River – Hinsdale, NH & Brattleboro, VT



New Hampshire Department of Transportation  
Vermont Agency of Transportation  
Southwest Region Planning Commission  
Windham Regional Commission

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1.0</b>	<b>BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW .....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1	Purpose of Public Involvement Plan.....	3
1.2	Guiding Principles .....	3
1.3	Public Involvement to Date .....	4
1.4	Project Purpose, Need and Preferred Alternative .....	5
1.5	Project Team .....	5
<b>2.0</b>	<b>PROJECT PROCESS.....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1	NHDOT Project Development Process.....	6
2.2	Project Meetings .....	7
2.2.1	Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Meetings .....	7
2.2.2	PAC Guidelines and Procedures .....	8
<b>3.0</b>	<b>COMMUNICATION METHODS .....</b>	<b>9</b>
3.1	NHDOT Website .....	9
3.2	Website Links .....	9
3.3	E-mail .....	9
3.4	Meetings .....	9
3.5	Media.....	10

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## 1.0 BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

### 1.1 Purpose of Public Involvement Plan

The purpose of this Public Involvement Plan (PIP) is to communicate information about how the public will be involved in the Hinsdale, NH-Brattleboro, VT Connecticut River Bridge Project, also identified by the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) as Project # 12210C and by the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) as Project # BF A004 (152). This PIP will:

- Communicate the principles that will guide the project's public involvement process;
- Communicate information about the project team; and
- Describe the communication methods that will be implemented to inform the community.

This Public Involvement Plan will be updated periodically to reflect adjustments to schedule and other items that change over the course of the project.

### 1.2 Guiding Principles

The Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT Connecticut River Bridge Project will incorporate guiding principles that ensure an inclusive and transparent project development process that is accessible to all stakeholders. A stakeholder is defined as a person or group affected by and/or with an interest in the outcome of the project. Examples of stakeholders identified for the Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT Connecticut River Bridge Project include:

- *People who live, work and/or travel along NH Route 119, VT Route 142 and other ancillary roads connected to either NH Route 119 in Hinsdale, NH or VT Route 142 in Brattleboro, VT;*
- *New Hampshire and Vermont municipal, regional, and state government elected and appointed officials, particularly those representing the Town of Hinsdale, NH and the Town of Brattleboro, VT;*
- *Groups with environmental, economic, or other concerns;*
- *Local utility companies;*
- *Transportation stakeholders such as Connecticut River Transit and New England Central Railroad;*
- *Resource agencies in NH and VT;*
- *NH Department of Safety and VT Department of Public Safety;*
- *Federal Highway Administration (FHWA); and*
- *NHDOT and the VTrans.*

The Project Team and Project Advisory Committee have adopted guiding principles that will drive the public involvement process. These guiding principles have been divided into two groups: 1) Qualities of Excellence in Transportation Design and 2) Characteristics of the Process Contributing to Excellence, and are presented below:

### ***Qualities of Excellence in Transportation Design***

1. The project satisfies the purpose and needs as previously identified by stakeholders and embodied in the project's environmental assessment report completed in December 2013. This report is available at <https://www.nh.gov/dot/projects/hinsdalebrattleboro12210/index.htm>.
2. The project involves efficient and effective use of the resources (time, budget, community) of all involved parties.
3. The project is seen as having added lasting value to the community.

### ***Characteristics of the Process Contributing to Excellence***

1. Communication with all stakeholders is open, honest, early, and continuous.
2. A multidisciplinary team is available throughout the process, with disciplines representing the needs of the specific project, and with the inclusion of the public.
3. A commitment to the process from top agency officials and local leaders is secured.
4. The public involvement process, which includes informal meetings, is tailored to the project.
5. A range of tools for communication about project development is used (e.g., visualization).

## **1.3 Public Involvement to Date**

The Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT Connecticut River Bridge Project has benefitted from a robust public involvement process since the early 1990s. To facilitate local and regional public input on the project a Hinsdale/Brattleboro Bridge Committee was formed. The Bridge Committee members included representatives from the Hinsdale Selectboard, the Brattleboro Selectboard, Southwest Region Planning Commission (SWRPC), Windham Regional Commission (WRC), local citizens and representatives from area social services, emergency services, and interest groups. The Bridge Committee assisted in developing the project's purpose and need, identifying resources, conducting public informational forums, developing and refining project alternatives, and identifying project-related area resource impacts.

A technical working group of transportation engineers was also formed including representatives NHDOT, VTrans, and consultant engineers. The working group helped identify and analyze technical issues, address Bridge Committee comments, provide coordination with resource agencies, formulate project alternatives, and assist with project management. Working group meetings were open to the public and were held in both Hinsdale and Brattleboro.

In 1998, purpose and need statements and a preferred alternative (Alternative F) were approved for the project. The Bridge Committee reaffirmed the selection of the same alternative as their preferred alternative in June 2000 and again in November of 2005. Correspondence from the Hinsdale Office of Selectmen and the Brattleboro Selectboard, dated February 27, 2012 and March 20, 2012 respectively, document continued support for the preferred alternative from both communities.

## 1.4 Project Purpose, Need and Preferred Alternative

The following purpose and need statements and preferred alternative were identified for Project #12210C and will continue to guide project development decisions:

**Purpose:** To provide a safe, functionally efficient, and cost-effective Route 119 transportation corridor across the Connecticut River in the vicinity of downtown Brattleboro, VT and Hinsdale, NH, and to preserve the socio-economic and environmental resources associated with the transportation corridor.

**Need:** There exists a need for the project to: a) maintain a transportation corridor between Hinsdale, NH and downtown Brattleboro, VT; b) correct the safety, structural, and functional deficiencies of the existing transportation corridor; c) maintain area social and economic relationships; d) preserve the integrity of area resources to the extent possible; and e) conserve fiscal resources.

**Preferred Alternative:** Alternative F would functionally replace both existing Route 119 bridges with a single bridge, to be located approximately 1,000 ft. south of the existing Route 119 western bridge and form a T-intersection with VT 142. In New Hampshire, Alternative F would slightly realign Route 119 roadway east of the Route 119 George's Field intersection. The new bridge is to be a steel I-beam girder bridge with aesthetic enhancements and a sidewalk on the upstream side. It would also allow a grade-separated railroad crossing in Vermont. The existing Route 119 bridges would remain open during the project, maintaining two lanes of traffic at all times during construction. After construction, the existing Route 119 bridges would be rehabilitated for pedestrian and bicycle usage and closed to motor vehicle traffic.

The project is listed in the current, approved NHDOT 10-Year Transportation Improvement Plan dated June 24, 2016 for construction beginning in 2019 with a total cost, including Vermont's share, of approximately \$45 million.

## 1.5 Project Team

The project team consists of:

- The Project Lead Team; and
- The Project Advisory Committee.

The Project Lead Team (PLT) consists of NHDOT and VTrans as well as SWRPC and WRC staff to facilitate the process with NHDOT serving as the lead project implementer. The Project Advisory Committee (PAC) members are comprised of Hinsdale and Brattleboro town staff as well as New Hampshire and Vermont local and state elected officials, regional planning commission transportation advisory committee members and citizen stakeholders. The PAC serves in an advisory role and is anticipated to be involved with the project up until the end of the project's design.

PROJECT LEAD TEAM				
NAME	ORGANIZATION	ADDRESS	TELEPHONE/EMAIL	BUREAU, POSITION
Don Lyford	NHDOT	7 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03302	(603) 271-2165 <a href="mailto:Donald.Lyford@dot.nh.gov">Donald.Lyford@dot.nh.gov</a>	Bureau of Highway Design, Project Manager
Bill Saffian	NHDOT	7 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03302	(603) 271-7415 <a href="mailto:Bill.Saffian@dot.nh.gov">Bill.Saffian@dot.nh.gov</a>	Bureau of Bridge Design, Senior Project Engineer
David Scott	NHDOT	7 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03302	(603) 271-1613 <a href="mailto:DScott@dot.nh.gov">DScott@dot.nh.gov</a>	Bureau of Bridge Design, In House Design Chief
Trent Zanes	NHDOT	7 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03302	(603) 271-7423 <a href="mailto:Trent.Zanes@dot.nh.gov">Trent.Zanes@dot.nh.gov</a>	Bureau of Highway Design, Preliminary Design Engineer
Dan Landry	VTrans	1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, VT 05633	(802) 828-3639 <a href="mailto:Dan.Landry@vermont.gov">Dan.Landry@vermont.gov</a>	Structures Co-Project Manager
Chris Baker	VTrans (Partner)	1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, VT 05633	(603) 548-6363 <a href="mailto:Christopher.Baker@partner.vermont.gov">Christopher.Baker@partner.vermont.gov</a>	Structures Co-Project Manager
J. B. Mack	SWRPC	37 Ashuelot Street, Keene, NH 03431	(603) 357-0557 <a href="mailto:jbmack@swrpc.org">jbmack@swrpc.org</a>	Principal Planner
Raúl Gonzalez	SWRPC	37 Ashuelot Street, Keene, NH 03431	(603) 357-0557 <a href="mailto:rgonzalez@swrpc.org">rgonzalez@swrpc.org</a>	Planner
Chris Company	WRC	139 Main Street, Suite #505, Brattleboro, VT 05301	(802) 257-4547 <a href="mailto:ccompany@sover.net">ccompany@sover.net</a>	Executive Director
Erica Roper	WRC	139 Main Street, Suite #505, Brattleboro, VT 05301	(802) 257-4547 <a href="mailto:eroper@sover.net">eroper@sover.net</a>	Transportation Planner

PROJECT ADVISORY COMMITTEE	
NAME	TITLE, REPRESENTING
Jill Collins	Town Administrator, Town of Hinsdale, NH
Kathryn Lynch	Community Development Coordinator, Town of Hinsdale, NH
Steve Diorio	Board of Selectmen Vice Chair, Town of Hinsdale, NH
Jay Ebbinghausen	Former Board of Selectmen, Town of Hinsdale, NH
Michael Abbott	Representative, New Hampshire State Legislature
Bob Harcke	President, Hinsdale Commercial and Industrial Development Commission
Ed Smith	Member/Resident, SWRPC Transportation Advisory Committee/Town of Hinsdale, NH
John Gomarilo	Member/Resident, SWRPC Transportation Advisory Committee/Town of Winchester, NH
Peter Elwell	Town Manager, Town of Brattleboro, VT
Rod Francis	Planning Director, Town of Brattleboro, VT
Kate O'Conner	Executive Director, Brattleboro Area of Commerce
Jen Austin	Coordinator, The Downtown Brattleboro Alliance
Fred Moriarty	Board of Trustees Treasurer, Brattleboro Museum and Art Center
Molly Burke	Representative, Vermont State Legislature
Lew Sorenson	Member/Resident, WRC Transportation Committee/Town of Dummerston, VT

## 2.0 PROJECT PROCESS

### 2.1 NHDOT Project Development Process

With NHDOT serving as the Project Lead Implementer, the Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT Connecticut River Bridge Project is following NHDOT's project development process based on the seven phases below.

- Project Scoping / Data Collection / Coordination (COMPLETE)
- Preliminary Engineering Studies / Environmental Evaluation (COMPLETE)
- Identification of Preferred Alternative / Draft Environmental Documentation (COMPLETE)
- Selected Alternative / Final Environmental Documentation (COMPLETE)
- Formal Public Hearing Process
- Final Design (Project Construction Plan Development) / Right-of-Way Acquisition
- Project Construction

This process is described in more detail in the *Project Development: Making Transportation Projects a Reality* guide that is available on the NHDOT's website at the following link: <https://www.nh.gov/dot/business/public.htm> under the Citizens Guide to Transportation Series section.

At this time the project has completed the Selected Alternative / Final Environmental Documentation phase and is entering the Final Design phase. As part of the Final Design phase a formal Public Hearing will be held to procure approval for the project's layout. The Hearing will be overseen by a Hearing Commission that is comprised of three members appointed by New Hampshire's Governor and Executive Council, who are tasked with making a decision on the layout of the preferred alternative that has been identified for the project. At the Public Hearing, the Department will make a formal presentation and public testimony will be taken, recorded, and transcribed for the Hearing Commission to determine the occasion for the layout as presented. All issues and/or comments raised at the Public Hearing or during the hearing comment period will be documented and addressed in a report entitled the *Report of the Commissioner (ROTC)*. The project team will coordinate with the PAC to help address each issue raised at the Hearing prior to the finalization of the ROTC. Should the Hearing Commission vote in favor of the project's layout, then the project will advance. The Public Hearing and subsequent layout approval represents a major milestone in the project development phase as it solidifies the major aspects and right of way requirements of the project's design.

## **2.2 Project Meetings**

Several types of meetings are planned over the course of this project. They are described in the sections below.

### **2.2.1 Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Meetings**

The purpose of each PAC meeting is to obtain input from committee and to facilitate the flow of information and ideas between committee members, communities, and public at-large. Presently, 6-8 PAC meetings are anticipated to occur over the next 24 months.

The first meeting will involve reviewing the project's status including its purpose, need, preferred alternative, programming schedule and cost. The first meeting is also expected to include a discussion about this Public Involvement Plan.

All meetings thereafter are expected to include updates on the project's status, issues related to public involvement, and review and discussion on project design elements, traffic management plans, and other related matters.

## 2.2.2 PAC Guidelines and Procedures

The PAC has an important task of providing public input to the Project Lead Team on the Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT Connecticut River Bridge Project. Because of the significance and complexity of the issues with which the PAC will be dealing, it will be necessary to make the most effective use of our meeting times. Therefore, as a group, the PAC will commit to the following guidelines and procedures:

### A. How we treat each other:

1. Each member has an equal right to speak and ask questions. There are no “dumb questions”.
2. Each member is encouraged to share individual viewpoints. Individual opinions are valid whether others agree with them or not.
3. We will listen to, respect and seek to understand the views of others, particularly those perspectives that differ from our own.
4. Disagreements will be explored not suppressed.
5. We will be courteous when addressing other members, staff, consultants, and members of the public.
6. We will refrain from interrupting each other, staff, consultants, and members of the public.
7. We will keep our comments relevant to the topic under discussion.

### B. How we arrive at recommendations:

1. The Project Advisory Committee will operate by consensus whenever possible. Consensus does not necessarily mean agreement or active support by each member. Those not objecting are not necessarily indicating that they favor, but merely that they can “live with it.”
2. In the absence of consensus, a super majority of three-quarters (75%) of the Project Advisory Committee members present is required for approval of an action.
3. Participation in the recommendation-making of the Project Advisory Committee shall be limited to its members.
4. In order to provide continuity in the group’s discussions, members are asked to make every effort to attend all meetings. However, if a member cannot attend, he or she may designate an alternate to attend and participate in discussions of the Project Advisory Committee in his or her absence.
5. Non-members shall attend as observers and may be invited to offer comments, if time allows.

### C. Role as Liaisons to the Project Development Process:

1. As it is NHDOT and VTrans’ intent that the members of the Project Advisory Committee represent the interests of a wide cross-section of citizens who live and work in the project area, PAC members are encouraged to report on project issues to others, particularly to groups or organizations to which they belong, and to bring input to PAC meetings that reflects the interests of these individuals and groups.
2. It will be helpful if PAC members explain to others the process being used to develop the project concepts so they better understand how the project is progressing.

We believe that following these guidelines and procedures will help us to develop recommendations that are fully considered and will be well received by NHDOT and VTrans, the public, and the appropriate Federal, State, and local government leaders and agencies whose support is essential for carrying out our recommendations.

### **3.0 COMMUNICATION METHODS**

Effective communication is essential to the ongoing success of the project. Below is a description of the communication methods that are planned for the project. As the project progresses, public involvement will be assessed periodically to determine if the methods of communication in use are effective or if adjustments are needed.

#### **3.1 NHDOT Website**

A web page for Hinsdale-Brattleboro 12210C project has been created on the NHDOT website and will be used to post pertinent project information, meeting agendas, and meeting summaries or notes. The web page can be accessed at the NHDOT's Project Information Center at <https://www.nh.gov/dot/projects/specifics.htm>. The purpose of the website is to keep the public informed about the project and provide another way for the public to provide input. The website content will be updated at project milestones and, as necessary, after project meetings. For questions or comments on the material posted on the website, please contact the NHDOT Project Manager:

- Don Lyford, NHDOT Project Manager, at [dlyford@dot.state.nh.us](mailto:dlyford@dot.state.nh.us) or (603) 271-2165.

#### **3.2 Website Links**

A link from the Town of Hinsdale, Town of Brattleboro, VTTrans, SWRPC and WRC websites to the project's web page on the NHDOT website will be provided.

#### **3.3 E-mail**

A primary method of communication for the Project Advisory Committee will be via e-mail. Individual e-mail addresses for the PAC members are contained within the project files. Meeting agendas, meeting notes, and other pertinent project information will be disseminated to the Project Advisory Committee via this method of communication. According to NH RSA 91-A, PAC members should not communicate via e-mail with one another on substantive issues of the PAC.

#### **3.4 Meetings**

Project Advisory Committee meetings will be used as different avenues to disseminate and discuss pertinent project related information. Public Informational meetings and Workshops may be used as other ways to discuss the Hinsdale, NH – Brattleboro, VT Connecticut River Bridge Project.

### 3.5 Media

In order to help maximize the distribution of meeting notices for the Project Advisory Committee meetings, Public Workshops, Public Informational meetings, and Public Hearing, news releases and/or meeting notices will be provided to local and regional newspapers.

- **Keene Sentinel**
  - **Publication Frequency:** daily
  - **Distribution Area:** Southwest New Hampshire
  - **Address:** 60 West Street, Keene, NH 03431
  - **Phone:** (603) 352-1234
  - **Fax:** (603) 352-9700
  - **E-mail:** [news@keenesentinel.com](mailto:news@keenesentinel.com)
  - **Website:** [www.sentinelsource.com](http://www.sentinelsource.com)
  
- **Brattleboro Reformer**
  - **Publication Frequency:** daily
  - **Distribution Area:** Southeast Vermont
  - **Address:** 62 Black Mountain Road, Brattleboro, VT 05301
  - **Phone:** (802) 254-2311
  - **Fax:** (802) 257-1305
  - **E-mail:** [news@reformer.com](mailto:news@reformer.com)
  - **Website:** <http://www.reformer.com>